

REPEAT

Oxford wins 6A state wrestling title for second straight year. 1B.



TASE ME, BRO!

Star reporter Kirsten Fiscus volunteers to get Tased. 1C.

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More women seeking office

Alabama, Calhoun County part of nationwide trend

BY TIM LOCKETTE

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Brooke Carbo never intended to become a politician.

Carbo, an Anniston resident, staff member at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and former Anniston Star copy editor, said she was looking for a way to be involved in the community when she volunteered last year for the Senate campaign for Doug Jones.

By early February, she was in the running herself — the only Democrat seeking election to Calhoun County's school board.

"If not now, I don't know when is a good time for new voices," Carbo said.

Carbo is just one of hundreds, if not thousands of women who are running for office for the first time across the country this year, many of them inspired by the wave of feminist activism that arose in response to the election of President Donald Trump.

There are female candidates in 57 of Alabama's 140 state legislative races this year, enough to more than double the female presence in the State House.

There's a real chance of a women-only governor's race in November — Gov. Kay Ivey and former state Supreme Court justice Sue Bell Cobb are considered top-tier contenders for their parties' nominations — and political scientists say they expect a

record number of women to qualify to run for Congress. (Qualifying is still open in many states, and there are women in 100 congressional races so far.)

The trend is particularly noticeable in Calhoun County, where women are in the running for five of the county's six state House seats. At present, there are two women, Republican Becky Nordgren of Gadsden and Democrat Barbara Boyd of Anniston, in the local delegation.

Some of the new candidates say they want to shift the focus back to education, health care and other kitchen table issues that have been

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Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Sheila Gilbert, head of the Calhoun County Democratic Party, speaks during a meeting in Jacksonville.

'Level of risk is low'

Inquiry found Florida suspect was no danger

BY AUDRA D.S. BURCH, FRANCES ROBLES AND PATRICIA MAZZEI

The New York Times

PARKLAND, Fla. — A Florida social services agency conducted an in-home investigation of Nikolas Cruz after he exhibited troubling behavior nearly a year and a half before he shot and killed 17 people at his former high school in Florida, a state report shows.

The agency, the Florida Department of Children and Families, had been alerted to posts on Snapchat of Cruz cutting his arms and expressing interest in buying a gun, according to the report. But after visiting and questioning Cruz at his home, the department determined he was at low risk of harming himself or others.

The report is the latest indication that Cruz was repeatedly identified by local and federal agencies as a troubled young man with violent tendencies. The FBI conceded Friday that it had failed to investigate a tip called into a hotline last month by a person close to Cruz identifying him as a gun owner intent on killing people, possibly at a school. The local police were called to Cruz's house many times for disturbances over several years.

Cruz also worried officials at his former school, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, who on at least one occasion alerted a mobile crisis

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Saul Martinez/The New York Times

A student attends a vigil to honor the victims of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., on Thursday.

BLACK HERITAGE FESTIVAL



Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star

Ava Smith performs at the 38th annual Black Heritage Festival at Longleaf Botanical Gardens on Saturday.

Longleaf Botanical Gardens hosts 38th annual event

BY BILL WILSON

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ANNISTON — Georgia Calhoun's smile never faded Saturday morning while she watched student after student perform during the 38th Annual Black Heritage Festival Saturday morning at the Longleaf Botanical Gardens.

"I'm just so happy to see so many children. We have a record number of children this year — over 100," said Calhoun, the festival coordinator.

"It makes me feel good — 38 years of this — 38 years of this and it's growing

stronger. I see the children progressing — to just stand before an audience and speak — it speaks volumes," Calhoun said.

Sarah Burke, education director at the Anniston Museum of Natural History, was busy ferreting the children in and out of the spacious auditorium when it was their turn to perform. Burke said 400 chairs were set up for the event and they were filled during the performances.

"It's a oration competition so students from the community have actually memorized a poem or recital and they're going

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ONLINE SLIDESHOW | See more photos at annistonstar.com

State bill would help first-time homebuyers

BY PATRICK MCCRELESS

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First-time homebuyers might get help saving for their down payments through new state legislation.

A bill in the Legislature, if passed into law, would let residents save for down payments on their first homes with special tax-deductible accounts. The legislation is similar to what some other states have approved in recent years to help stimulate their housing markets and promote home ownership. Still, some housing experts question how much help the bill would provide in the area, given the high availability of loans, the relatively low amount of affordable housing and many younger and low-income residents' inability to save much money at all.

The bill would provide an income tax deduction of up to \$6,000 for individuals and up to \$12,000 for joint accounts for a period of five years.

Iowa, Minnesota and Mississippi passed similar savings account bills last year. Other states have also passed similar bills in recent years.

"We're only about the seventh state looking at this tax savings account legislation for first-time homebuyers," said K.C. Conway, head of research for the Alabama Center for Real Estate. "And there's some real meat on the bone of this bill unlike some others, like Minnesota's, which only lets you deduct tax off interest gained from the savings accounts."

Jeremy Walker, CEO of the Alabama Association of Realtors, said the idea of the bill is to help both low-income residents and younger millennials buy their first homes.

"There are renters, particularly millennials, who have struggled with student loan debt ... this bill can help them take that leap into their first home," Walker said.

A recent Alabama Association of Realtors-commissioned study estimates 0.2 percent of eligible residents would use the savings accounts and that the program would raise sales by 130 homes a year in the state. Also, the savings program would generate about \$26.8 million annually in economic activity, spurred by increased home purchases, the study estimates.

Some Calhoun County real estate experts aren't yet convinced such a program would benefit the area much.

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Zebedee Murphy Jr., Anniston

Jean B. Farr Poland, Oxford
Ella M. Williams, Anniston
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